

THE  
REVOLUTION



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## The Revolution in India

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**T**HIS reprint of the thesis adopted in the autumn of 1941 by the Formation Committee of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India is reproduced from the "Fourth International." We republish it as the best way at the moment, according to our means, of helping our fellow workers in India and of demonstrating our solidarity with Indian revolutionary socialism.

The approaching revolution has brought about the uniting of several groups to form the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India, and this body has established, with the Ceylon Socialist Party and a Burmese group, the Federation of Bolshevik-Leninist Parties of Burma, Ceylon and India. We hope that the groups will quickly and surely overcome the growing pains and crises of every young organisation and develop rapidly into the leading party of the revolution in India. The objective situation is immensely favourable for them.

The Fourth International in India is agitating round the slogan of a Constituent Assembly, as a means of uniting and politically activating the masses and of obtaining in a democratic election and a democratic assembly the open and free struggle of parties and classes. The slogan of the Constituent Assembly will assist the concentration of the political education of the masses over a whole epoch into the period of the rise and fall of this organ of bourgeois democracy and its replacement by the Congress of Soviets.

The policy of the revolutionary socialists in Britain in relation to India is simple. The Indian peoples must be free to solve their social problems in their own way. Therefore, the British working class agitates for the withdrawal of British political and military rule, and pledges itself **now** that the future proletarian government of Britain will **at once** end British overlordship by renouncing unreservedly all claims of British capitalism in India and by withdrawing all state organisations, including the political bodies thinly disguised as "missions." At the same time, revolutionary



socialism in Britain declares itself ready to help by every revolutionary means, the struggle of the Indian workers and peasants for socialism.

If British proletarians in uniform have been used for generations to maintain the exploitation of the Indian masses by British capitalism, the exploitation of India, brightest gem in the imperial crown, has been used to maintain the rule of capitalism at home. The collapse of the British empire under the blows of war is breaking one after the other the chains that bind the British working class to the most monstrous ruling class in history. The revolutionary socialists in Britain greet with enthusiasm the possibility of revolution in India opened up by the defeat of British imperialism in the war of capitalist gangsters. The breaking up of the empire by revolutions within is one of the historical tasks which cannot much longer be delayed. The revolution which sets the Indian peoples free to deal with British imperialism as it deserves will give them the means of dealing with Japanese imperialism with drastic thoroughness if imperialist Japan dares to attack a revolutionary India.

Self-determination for the Indian peoples! Let the workers and peasants be free to go along their own historical road. International solidarity! Let the proletarians of India and Britain march together in the struggle for World Socialism!

And let the British workers remain constantly vigilant. Let them watch closely the manoeuvres of their "own" bourgeoisie. A revolution in India may produce a new alliance between British and Japanese Imperialism to crush this new beginning. Only a correct understanding of class politics will enable the working class to organise itself for revolution and emerge victorious over all the manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie. Towards this understanding this reprint is a slight contribution.

T. TAIT MEMORIAL COMMITTEE.

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# Britain's Reactionary Role in India

**I**NDIA, the largest, the longest dominated and exploited of British conquests, Britain's richest field of investment, its source of incalculable plunder and profit, its base of Asiatic expansion, the inexhaustible reservoir of material and human resources for British wars, the focus of all British strategic aims, the pivot of the Empire, and the bulwark of British world domination, after 200 years of subjection offers the most complete demonstration of the workings and results of the colonial system of modern imperialism.

Every European colonising power directed its first efforts towards India, and the bitterest struggles for the glittering prize were fought on the battlefields of Europe and India alike. The success of Britain in defeating both her continental rivals and the native rulers of India paved the way for her subsequent world supremacy. The plunder of India was a main source of the primitive accumulation of capital which made possible the English industrial revolution. The exploitation of the Indian market and of Indian raw materials provided the basis of British industrial expansion in the nineteenth century. To-day India provides a field of investment for a quarter of British overseas capital holding, and sends to Britain roughly £150 millions annually, as tribute in various forms.

After 200 years of imperialist rule, India presents a picture of poverty and misery of the masses which is without equal in the world—the more striking because up to the eighteenth century the economic condition of India was relatively advanced, and Indian methods of production and of industrial and commercial organisation could compare with those of any part of the world ; and because of the vast natural wealth and resources of the country, which cannot be utilised and developed under the imperialist system.

European capitalist penetration of India began with the Portuguese establishment of their factory in Calicut. The British (1600) Dutch (1602) and the French (1664) formed their trading companies in the course of the seventeenth century.

## Capitalist Destruction of Indian Economy

The British conquest of India, carried out piecemeal and in the most ruthless, vindictive, and deceitful manner, differed from every previous conquest of India in that, while earlier foreign conquerors left untouched the traditional economy, British imperialism broke down the whole framework of Indian society.



The first steps of this destruction were carried out by (a) the East India Company's colossal direct plunder, (b) the British neglect of irrigation and public works, (c) the wrecking of the Indian land system and its replacement by a system of landlordism and individual landholding, (d) direct prohibition and heavy duties on the export of Indian manufactures to Europe and to England.

But it was the operations of the nineteenth century British industrial capitalism, and the governmental policies initiated by it in India, that decisively broke up the Indian economic structure. The industrial capitalists of Britain had a clear-cut aim in India—to reduce it to an agricultural colony of British capitalism, supplying raw materials and absorbing its manufactured goods.

Britain captured and developed the Indian market for her industrial goods on the basis of the technical superiority of English machine industry (for which the Indian plunder had provided the accumulated capital), while deliberately utilising the state power to block the export of Indian goods to Europe and permit the free entry of British goods to India. The destruction and collapse of Indian manufacturers in this unequal struggle was the inevitable result. The ruin of millions of artisans and craftsmen was not accompanied by any growth of newer forms of industry, and the old urban centres of Indian manufactures (Dacca, Murchibad, Surat) were depopulated and laid waste.

The work of destruction was not confined to the towns. The handloom and the spinning wheel were the pivots of the structure of Indian society which was based on the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits. British steam and science uprooted the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry. The British intruder thus broke up the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning wheel, struck at the roots of the Indian society, and destroyed the balance of the village economy.

To consolidate the conquest of India and to develop the Indian resources for exploitation by the British capitalist class as a whole, the East India Company was replaced in 1858 by direct governmental administration. After a century of neglect of the most elementary functions of government, the British inaugurated a process of the active development of the country by (a) building a network of railroads, (b) the development of roads, (c) the introduction of the electric telegraph and of a uniform postal system, (d) giving the benefits of Western education to a limited class of Indians, and (e) the introduction of the European banking system into India. While opening up India for commercial penetration and supplying a market for British iron, steel and engineering industries, this process of development—especially the construction of railways—laid the foundations of a new stage—the development of British capital investments in India.

The last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth were marked by the imperialist export of finance capital from the countries of Western Europe and North America to every corner of the globe, and by conquest and exploitation of all the backward countries through the colonial system. Between 1880



and 1914 the major European powers and the United States had carve up the whole world into colonies and spheres of exploitation.

### **The Rule of Finance-Capital**

This period of modern imperialist expansion was marked in India by an intensification of British exploitation, and a corresponding change in its character, wherein the finance-capitalist exploitation of India came to dominate all other methods. Nevertheless, the new basis of exploitation did not replace the already established forms of plunder and industrial and trading exploitation, but was auxiliary and parallel to these processes.

British capitalist investment in India developed at a rapid pace in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the expansion of railway construction, and also with the establishment of tea, coffee and rubber plantations, and other minor enterprises.

The holdings of British capital in India developed not on the basis of the export of British capital, but rather through the plunder of the Indian people, which was reinvested in India, as a rich source of interest. The sterling debt of the Indian government, which included more than one-third of the total holdings of British capital, has been manipulated to include the cost of every British imperialist undertaking (including wars for the subjection of India, and other colonial wars) which could conceivably be charged to India. The colossal amount of this debt bears no relation to the costs of the public works schemes carried out. At the same time, the almost continuous excess of the value of Indian exports to Britain over that of imports, has left no room for a real export of capital to India. Nevertheless, the volume of British holdings in India to-day exceeds £1,000 millions.

With the post-war weakening of Britain's share of the Indian market (Britain's share of Indian imports dropped from 63 per cent. to 29 per cent. between 1913 and 1937), in the face of foreign competition and the rise of Indian—especially cotton—industry, British imperialism has consolidated its financial stranglehold on the Indian economy as its chief source of profit in India. The proportion of Britain's total overseas investment which has been placed in India has risen from 11 per cent. in 1911 to 25 per cent. in 1937. Despite this, there has been since 1927 (with the collapse of the post-war boom and the general crisis), a sharp drop in the actual volume of British capital newly invested in India, which reflects the general stagnation of the economic development in India.

The capital investments of Britain in India have never led to the industrialisation of India on a scale proportionate to their volume. The colossal waste involved in the railway construction in the last century, and the unproductive expenditure which swelled India's public debt, created a glaring disproportion between the size of British investments and the slow economic development of the country. Up to 1914, 97 per cent. of British capital invested in India was devoted to purposes of government (i.e. wars, the heavy costs of bureaucratic administration, levies for costly durbars, etc.),



to transport, plantations, and finance. These investments served as auxiliaries to the commercial penetration of India and its exploitation as a source of raw materials and a market for British goods, and did not lead to the development of modern industry in India on any commensurable scale.

The industrial development of India which has taken place in recent times bears no relation to Indian needs. The vast resources of India have never been tapped. The rate of industrial advance, far lower than that of other large non-European countries, has not, even in modern times, kept pace with the decline of Indian handicrafts—with the result that from 1911 to 1931 there has been a reduction in the proportion of the population dependent on industry (including domestic industry).

The growth of Indian industry has been greatly impeded by British imperialism, for fear of competition with home industries, by administrative neglect, by a hostile tariff policy, and by unfavourable currency manipulations. Until 1914 this policy of opposition to industrial development in India was openly followed, particularly by the removal of import duties on competing British goods. The brief and half-hearted reversal of policy after 1914 and during the period when British capital flowed in to share in the profits of the post-war boom, was nullified by the later raising of the exchange rates, which disastrously hit Indian exports.

### **British Fetters on Production**

Under these conditions, the development of modern industry in India has taken place at a very slow rate, and in lopsided fashion, chiefly in light industry. The basis necessary for real industrial development—heavy industry—has never been laid. Until 1914, large organised production in India was represented chiefly by the cotton, jute and coal-mining industries, and by the tea, rubber and coffee plantations. The post-war period, when foreign competition was reduced, was marked by a short and feverish boom which led to the development of other industries, including steel and iron, cement, manganese, and other minor types. This period was utilised by British capital, which during the years 1921 to 1923 flowed in an average annual rate of over £23 millions. But the brief post-war boom was followed by a period of stagnation and decline, prolonged by the currency policy of the government, and finally intensified by the world crisis of 1929-1931 which signified the entry of world capitalism into a period of decline. Indian industry shows even to-day no indication of recovery. The scope of the industrialisation undertaken for war purposes during the present imperialist war, is not meant to include an all-sided development of Indian industry, but will be restricted to the strategic needs of British imperialism. Such an all-sided development of industry is excluded by the hostility of the government to Indian industrial development, by the determination of Britain to maintain its share of the Indian market, and above all by the insoluble problems of the home market caused by the extreme impoverishment



of the agricultural population under imperialism. The industrialisation of India, on which her future depends, cannot be carried out without the overthrow of imperialism and a sweeping transformation of agrarian relations.

Despite the hostility of imperialism to the industrialisation of India, it is British and not Indian capital that has always held the dominant place in Indian industry, not only through the decisively greater volume of its investments in industry, but also through its financial stranglehold on the whole Indian economy. The Indian capitalist class, whose growth was mainly connected with the development of the cotton industry, has never been able to shake off the controlling power of British finance capital.

Despite the advance of Indian capital, British capital remains in effectively monopolist domination in banking, commerce, exchange and insurance, in shipping, in the tea, coffee, and rubber plantations, and in the jute industry. In iron and steel, Indian capital has been forced to come to terms with British capital, and even in the cotton industry, the home of Indian capital, the control of British capital, through the managing agency system, is very great. Already in 1928, (before the economic crisis), English managing agents controlled the actual majority of the capital of cotton companies (50.3 per cent.). The economic depression which affected Indian industry after 1924 (and especially after 1929), and the bankruptcy, liquidations and difficulties of many Indian firms which had arisen in the post-war period, were utilised by British capital to strengthen its hold on Indian industry.

Most decisive for the controlling power of British finance capital is the role of the foreign banking system, working in conjunction with the government's financial and exchange policies. Financial power remains monopolised in British hands, through the Reserve Bank of India, the Imperial Bank, and the big Exchange Banks. The Indian joint-stock banks hold less than one-third of bank deposits in India, and are themselves being invaded by British capital.

The Indian capitalist class, therefore, despite its growth in recent times, remains essentially dependent upon, and an agentry of British finance capital, performing a subsidiary role in the exploitation of India. Despite its dreams of industrialisation, and of a broadened base of exploitation for itself, the Indian bourgeoisie shackled as it is to imperialism cannot play the historic role of the earlier West European bourgeoisie in liberating and developing the productive forces. The industrial advance of India demands absolutely the overthrow of imperialism, with which Indian bourgeois interests are indissolubly bound, and the overthrow of which they will be bound to resist.

Nevertheless, the rising productive forces in India are straining against the fetters of imperialism and of the obsolete economic structure which it maintains and protects. This conflict finds its expression not only in the industrial stagnation, but in a much sharper way in the agrarian crisis, which is the index of the bankruptcy of imperialist economy, and the main driving force towards revolution.



### The Permanent Agrarian Crisis

Britain relegated to India the role of an agricultural appendage to imperialism. The ravages of Indian industries carried out in the nineteenth century drove the population of the ruined industrial centres back to the land and at the same time ruined the livelihood of millions of artisans in the villages. The overcrowding of agriculture which has reached a stage to-day where three-fourths of the entire Indian population are solely dependent on the land, and where the proportion of land available for cultivation has fallen to less than  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acre per head of the agrarian population. The effect of this exaggerated disequilibrium in the economy is further aggravated by the stagnation and deterioration of agriculture itself, for which the British are also directly responsible through their disruption of the village economy, their iniquitous exactions of land revenue, their expropriation of the peasantry, their creation of parasitic landlordism, and their notorious neglect of public works on the land, which have been from time immemorial the function of the government and without which in India the cultivation of the soil cannot be carried on.

The criminal indifference of the government and the suffocating parasitism of the landlords are responsible for the incredibly low productivity and exhaustion of the soil (of which 35 per cent. is left waste in India and Burma), and the recent actual shrinkage in the area under cultivation while the population is on the increase. These conditions, which have depressed the vast majority of the rural population to a level of unspeakable poverty and chronic semi-starvation, and have led to a state of permanent agricultural crisis, are inevitably paving the way for a sweeping revolution as their only outcome and solution.

The characteristic process of imperialism, the expropriation of the colonial population from ownership of the land, was carried out by the British under cover of legal forms, which in effect transformed the "eternal" land system of the Indian village commune into an inextricable amalgam of feudal and semi-feudal rights and tenures. The British introduced into India private property in land. In Bengal they created a caricature of English landed property on a large scale; in South Eastern India a caricature of small allotment property; in the North West they did their utmost to transform the Indian commune with common ownership of the land into a caricature of itself.

The aims which guided the British transformation of the Indian land system were twofold—firstly to guarantee the effective collection of their extortionate land revenues, which rose steeply from the time of the Conquest (from £4 millions in 1800 to £15 millions in 1857 to £23 millions in 1936-1937); and in the second place to create Indian landed interests deeply interested in the continuance of British domination. It is above all the still unbroken alliance between British imperialism and Indian landlordism that links up the overthrow of imperialism with the agrarian revolution in India.

Landlordism was created and fostered by the British not only in the provinces of temporary and permanent *zamindari* (landlords)



—Bengal, United Province, Bihar, Punjab, but also in the Ryotwari areas in which the processes of mortgaging and subletting have been carried to fantastic lengths, so that the cultivator of the soil is despoiled by an increasing army of functionless intermediaries in addition to the big parasites and the government itself. A great proportion of the real cultivators of the soil are without rights of any kind and remain unaffected even by the temporary legislation by which the government has sought to stave off the impending crisis. Even in the Ryotwari areas, where settlement was originally made with the cultivators themselves, they have been dispossessed to a great extent by moneylenders and others.

From the beginning, landlordism under British rule has been parasitic in character, since landlords neither supply agricultural capital nor control farming operations. To-day landlordism, taken in conjunction with its superstructure of sub-infeudation and subletting, is the most effective barrier to the development of modern large scale agriculture.

The penetration of finance-capital in the agrarian field, which characterises the recent period, far from freeing the productive forces from the incubus of feudalism or introducing modern productive technique, has taken place for the most part within the framework of feudal and semi-feudal relations and has become enmeshed with feudal forms of exploitation. The net result has been to add to the burdens of the peasantry by decisively accelerating their expropriation from the land and by crushing them under a load of debt, which amounted in 1937 to £1,350 millions. The moneylender's exactions and confiscations, together with the payments demanded by the government and the landlord's extortions, forms for the peasantry a triple scourge which has reduced the greater proportion of cultivators in India to the status of unprotected tenants, sharecroppers and landless wage-labourers. Capitalist inroads have sharply accelerated the differentiation of classes within rural society, increasing the numbers of parasitic rent-receivers on one hand and of propertyless elements on the other.

The particularly rapid growth of parasitic landlordism in recent times, as well as the sharp rise in rural debt (from £400 millions in 1921 to £1,350 in 1937) is really the reflection of the invasion of moneyed interests, big and small, in the agrarian field, having failed to find effective outlets for investment in productive industry. Thus the direct plunder of the peasantry of the early British period has given place to a network of forms of exploitation by modern finance-capital, with its host of subsidiary parasites in the Indian economy. The Indian capitalist class, no less than the British Government and the semi-feudal landlords, are tied to the existing order of rural society and are interested in its perpetuation.

The abolition of landlordism in all its forms, in defiance of all these vested interests, the abolition of rural debt, and the unencumbered transfer of the land to the cultivators themselves, is the basic social task of the Indian revolution and the absolute prerequisite of agricultural advance in India.



British imperialism in the epoch of declining world capitalism has become the most powerful reactionary force in India, in turn buttressing all other forms of reaction. Its failure to develop the industrial forces in India through industrialisation, and the chronic stagnation and decay of agriculture under its rule, make its continued existence incompatible with the advancement of India and render its overthrow an historical inevitability. To maintain its rule in India, in the face of the rising tide of mass revolt, British imperialism uses all the weapons of bureaucratic and military repression with increasing viciousness. Nevertheless, the day of reckoning cannot be long postponed. The solution of the terrible problems of the toiling millions of India demand the overthrow and elimination of British imperialism, which is the foremost task of the coming Indian revolution.

*Adopted 1941.*



# The Classes of India and Their Political Role

## The Native Princes

The revolt of 1857 represented the last attempt of the old feudal ruling class of India to throw off the British yoke. This revolt, which despite its reactionary leadership laid bare the depth of mass discontent and unrest, alarmed the British rulers, and led to a radical change in policy in India. Seeking for bases of social and political support, the British abandoned the policy of annexing the Indian states within British India, instead guaranteeing the remnants of the feudal rulers their privileged and parasitic positions in innumerable petty principalities, buttressing their power and protecting them against the masses, and receiving in return the unqualified support of these elements for the British rule. The princes of the Indian states, maintained at the cost of a chaotic multiplication of administrative units, are to-day only the corrupt and dependent tools of British imperialism, and the feudatory states, checker-boarding all India as they do, are no more than a vast network of fortresses erected by the British in their own defence. The variety of the states and jurisdiction of the feudal princes defies a generalised description, but they bolster alike the reactionary policies of imperialism in India. The despotism and misgovernment practised by the great majority of these rulers in their territories have created and perpetuated conditions of backwardness extreme even in India, including the most primitive forms of feudalism and slavery itself. Their collective interests are represented by the Chamber of Princes, instituted in 1921, which is the most reactionary political body in India.

## The Landlords

The most solid supporters of British rule in India, after the princes, are the landlords. In fact the majority of the princes are no more themselves than glorified landlords, playing the same parasitic role as the landlords of British India. The landlords of India have a record of medieval oppression, of rack-renting and usury, and of unbridled gangsterism over a disarmed peasantry, which has made them the most hated exploiters in India. The rapid extension of landlordism in modern times through the development of intermediary and new parasitic classes on the peasantry, has not only increased the numbers of those who receive land rents, but firmly linked their interests with those of the Indian



capitalist class, by ties of investment and mortgage. The political role of the landlords has always been one of complete subservience to British imperialism, as well as the greatest obstacle in the way of agricultural development which demands a thorough-going democratic revolution in the agrarian field and the liquidation of landlordism in all its forms.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of an Indian capitalist class in Bombay and other industrial centres. The Indian bourgeoisie of the early period, conscious of its own weakness and dependent position in economy, offered no challenge whatever to British rule. But the deep economic conflict between their own interests and those of their British competitors drove them from the first decade of the twentieth century, to utilise the national political movement to strengthen their bargaining power against British imperialism.

### **The Indian Bourgeoisie**

The bourgeoisie, in the absence of any competing class and especially of an independent proletarian movement, assumed complete leadership of the national political movement through its party, the Indian National Congress. The bourgeois leadership of the movement was clearly demonstrated in 1905, by the choice of the economic boycott of foreign goods as the method of struggle against the partition of Bengal. The aims of the bourgeoisie were defined during this period as the attainment of "colonial self-government within the Empire" as junior partners of the imperialists. They abandoned the struggle and adopted a policy of co-operation with the British after the grant of the Morley-Minto reforms, their own aims being satisfied for the moment.

The last years following the first World War, and the years which immediately followed it, were marked by the development, for the first time since 1857, of a mass struggle on a national scale against imperialism based on the discontent and unrest of the peasantry and the working class. This discontent was especially marked in Bombay, where the wave of working-class strikes was on a scale hitherto unknown in India, and reached its highest point in 1920 for which year the number of strikers reached the gigantic total of 1½ millions. The Montague-Chelmsford reforms were designed to meet this rising threat by buying off the bourgeois leadership, and they succeeded to an extent, that section of the bourgeoisie who wanted wholehearted co-operation with the government seceding from the Congress to form the Liberal Federation (1918). But the growth of the mass movement compelled the Congress bourgeoisie either to enter the struggle or be isolated from the masses. Launching under its own banner the passive resistance movement, and later the mass civil disobedience movement of 1921-1922, the Congress entered the struggle, but only to betray it from the inside.

The mass movement which, despite its timid and unwilling leadership, had attained the undeniable character of a mass revolt



against the British Raj, was abruptly called off when at its height by the bourgeois leader Gandhi, and a period of demoralisation followed for the masses. The reactionary and treacherous character of the bourgeois leadership was shown clearly in the Bardoli Resolution of 1922, which condemned the no-tax campaign of the peasantry and insisted on the continuation of rent payments to the landlords, assuring the zamindars (landlords) that the Congress "had no intention of attacking their legal rights." The bourgeoisie thus demonstrated its reactionary attitude toward the land question in which lies the main driving force to revolution in India.

With the worsening conditions of the late 20's, the mass struggle developed again at a rising tempo, and was again led to defeat by the Congress (1930-1934). The aims of the new struggle were limited by Gandhi beforehand to the celebrated 11 points which represented exclusively the most urgent demands of the Indian bourgeoisie. Nevertheless the movement developed in 1930 far beyond the limits laid down for it by the Congress, with rising strikes, powerful mass demonstrations, the Chittagong Armoury raid, and the risings at Peshawar and Sholapur. Gandhi declared openly to the Viceroy that he was fighting as much against the rising forms of revolt as against the British imperialists. The aim of the bourgeoisie was henceforward to secure concessions from imperialism at the price of betraying the mass struggle in which they saw a real and growing threat to themselves. The Gandhi-Irwin settlement was a settlement against the mass movement, and paved the way for a terrific repression which fell on the movement during its ebb in 1932-1934.

Since 1934 Gandhi and the leaders of the Congress have had as their chief aim that of preventing the renewal of a mass struggle against imperialism, while using their leadership of the national movement as a lever to secure the concessions they hope to obtain from imperialism. They see in the rising forces of revolt, and especially in the emergence of the working class as a political force, a threat to their own bases of exploitation, and are consequently following an increasingly reactionary policy. Reorganising the party administration so as to secure to the big bourgeoisie the unassailable position of leadership (1934), they transferred the centre of activities to the parliamentary field and to working the new Constitution in such a way as to secure the maximum benefits to the bourgeoisie, until the intransigence of the British parliament and the Indian government in the war situation and the withdrawal of many of the political concessions of provincial autonomy again forced the Congress into opposition (1939). The Congress bourgeoisie then engaged in a restricted campaign of individual "non-violent" civil disobedience with narrowly defined bourgeois aims, and under the dictatorial control of Gandhi himself. By this move they hoped to prevent the development of a serious mass struggle against imperialism, the leadership of which will be bound to pass into other hands.

The main instrument whereby the Indian bourgeoisie seeks to maintain control over the national movement is the Indian National



Congress, the classic party of the Indian capitalist class, seeking as it does the support of the petty bourgeoisie and if possible of the workers, for its own aims. Despite the fact that under these conditions revolutionary and semi-revolutionary elements still remain within the fold of the Congress, despite its mass membership (five millions in 1939), and despite the demagogic programmatic pronouncements (Constituent Assembly, Agrarian Reform) which the Congress has repeatedly made, the direction of its policy remains exclusively in the hands of the bourgeoisie as also the control of the party organisation, as was dramatically proved at Tripuri and after. The Indian National Congress in its social composition, its organisation, and above all in its political leadership can be compared to the Kuomintang, which led the Chinese revolution of 1925-1927 to its betrayal and defeat.

The characterisation of the Indian National Congress as a multi-class party, as the "National United Front," or as "a platform rather than a party," is a flagrant deception and calculated only to hand over to the bourgeoisie in advance the leadership of the coming struggle, and so make its betrayal and defeat a foregone conclusion.

The more open reactionary interests of the Indian bourgeoisie find expression in many organisations which exist side by side with the Congress. Thus the Liberal Federation (1918) represents those bourgeois elements who co-operate openly with the imperialists. The sectional interests of the propertied classes are represented by various communal organisations, notably the Moslem League (1905) and the Hindu Maha Sabha (1925) which are dominated by large landlords and bourgeois interests and pursue a reactionary policy in all social and economic issues, deriving a measure of mass support by an appeal to the religious and communal sentiments of the backward masses.

### **The Petty-Bourgeois Intelligentsia**

Because of their position of dependence on the capitalist class, and in the absence of a real challenge to their leadership from the proletariat, the various elements of the urban petty bourgeoisie and of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia have always played a satellite role to the bourgeoisie. The radicalisation of the petty bourgeoisie under imperialism found its first and strongest expression in the prolonged terrorist movement in Bengal and elsewhere, the failure of which, despite the heroism of its protagonists, demonstrated finally the utter inability of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia to find an independent solution of its own problems.

To-day the urban petty bourgeoisie finds its political reflection mainly in the various organisations within the fold of, or under the influence of the Indian National Congress, such as the Forward Bloc, the Congress Socialist Party, the Radical Democratic Party of M. N. Roy, etc.

Within the Congress, the petty-bourgeois leaders have repeatedly lent themselves to be used by the bourgeoisie as a defensive colora-



tion before the masses, bridging with their radical phrases and irresponsible demagoguery the gap between the reactionary Congress leadership and the hopes and aspirations of the masses. Thus the demagoguery of Bose and Nehru, as well as the "socialist" phrases of M. N. Roy and the Congress Socialist Party, to say nothing of the "Marxism" of the National United Fronters of the Communist Party of India, have in turn served the Gandhian leaders as a smoke-screen for their own reactionary manoeuvres.

The humiliating capitulation of the Congress Socialist Party to the Congress leadership, the conversion of M. N. Roy and his Radical Democrats to imperialist war-mongering, and the departure of Subhas Chandra Bose from the Indian scene, are symptoms of the diminishing political role of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, which, however theatrically it may posture before the masses in normal times, exposes in times of growing crisis its political bankruptcy, and exists only to be utilised by the bourgeoisie in its deception of the masses.

### **The Peasantry**

The peasantry comprises the vast majority of the Indian population (70 per cent.). The stagnation and deterioration of agriculture, the increasing land hunger, the exactions of the government, the extension of parasitic landlordism, the increasing load of rural debt, and the consequent expropriation of the cultivators, are together inevitably driving the peasantry on to the revolutionary road. Peasant unrest, leading frequently to actual risings (Santhal Rebellion of 1855, Deccan Riots of 1875), have been a recurring motif in Indian history. In the last two decades, and especially since the world economic crisis (1929), the peasant movement has been on the rise, and has taken on a more and more radical character.

It is precisely the depth and scope of the agrarian crisis that places the revolution against imperialism on the order of the day, contributing to it the driving force and the sweep which are necessary to accomplish the overthrow of the ruling power. Nevertheless the agrarian revolution requires the leadership of another class to raise the struggle to the level of a national revolution. The isolation and the scattered character of the peasant economy, the historical and political backwardness of the rural masses, the lack of inner cohesion within the peasantry, and the conflicting aims of its various strata, all combine to make it impossible for the peasantry to play an independent role in the coming revolution.

The invasion of moneyed interests has sharply accelerated the disintegrating tendencies within the peasantry. The creation of a vast army of landless peasants, share-croppers and wage-labourers on the land has immensely complicated the agrarian problem, and rendered necessary revolutionary measures of the most far-reaching character. The basic antagonism between landlord and peasant has not been reduced by the entry of finance capital into agriculture, since this did not bring with it any change for the better in farming methods or in the system of land tenure. On the contrary, the



Landlord-peasant antagonism has been given a sharper emphasis by the extension of parasitic claims on the land, and the overthrow of landlordism by the transference of the land to the cultivator remains the primary task of the agrarian revolution. Nevertheless, this basic antagonism has been supplemented by a new one, which is reflected in the growth of an agricultural proletariat in the strict sense of the word. Besides this, the invasion of finance capital has made the problems of mortgage and of rural debt more pressing in some parts of India than in others, and these facts taken together will probably give to the agrarian revolution, at least in some areas, an anti-capitalist character at a very early stage.

### **Leadership of the Peasantry**

The leadership of the revolution, which the peasantry cannot provide for itself, can come only from an urban class. But the Indian bourgeoisie cannot possibly provide this leadership, since in the first place it is itself reactionary through and through on the land question, sharing as it does so largely in the parasitic exploitation of the peasantry. Above all, the bourgeoisie, on account of its inherent weakness and its dependence on imperialism, is destined to play a counter-revolutionary role in the coming struggle for power.

The leadership of the peasantry in the petty-bourgeois democratic agrarian revolution that is immediately posed can therefore come only from the industrial proletariat, and an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is a fundamental prerequisite of the Indian revolution. This alliance cannot be conceived in the form of a "workers' and peasants' party" or of a "democratic dictatorship" in the revolution. The revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and peasantry can mean only proletarian leadership of the peasant struggle and, in case of revolutionary victory, the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship with the support of the peasantry.

### **The Peasant Movement**

The growth of the peasant movement in recent times has led to the formation of various mass organisations among the peasantry, among which the most important are the Kisan Sanghs (Peasant Committees) which are loosely linked up in a district, provincial, and finally on an all-India scale in the All-India Kisan Sabha, whose membership in 1939 was 800,000. These associations, whose precise character varies from district to district, are in general to-day under the control and influence of petty-bourgeois intelligentsia elements who, as pointed out before, cannot follow a class policy independent of the bourgeoisie, although the growing mass pressure upon them is reflected in the more sharply radical demands they are forced to put forward. There is no means of deciding in advance the exact role of the Kisan Sanghs in the coming revolution.



This will be determined by the correlation of forces within them, which in turn will depend largely on the consciousness and militancy of the lower layers of the peasantry and the measure of control they exercise in the Kisan Sanghs. But it can be stated beforehand, on the basis of the experience of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, that the existence of Kisan Sanghs on however wide a scale does not offer a substitute for the *separate* organisations of poor peasants and agricultural labourers in rural Soviets, under the leadership of the urban working class. Only the Soviets can assure that the agrarian revolution will be carried out in a thorough-going manner.

### The Working Class

The industrial proletariat is the product of modern capitalism in India. Its rapid growth in the period since 1914 can be illustrated by a comparison of the Factory Acts Statistics for 1914 and 1936 :

	<i>No. of Factories</i>	<i>No. of workers employed</i>
1914	2,936	950,973
1936	9,329	1,652,147

The numerical strength of the industrial proletariat can be estimated at five millions, distributed mainly as follows (1935 figures) :

(a) Workers in power driven factories (including those of the Native States)	1,855,000
(b) Miners	371,000
(c) Railwaymen	636,000
(d) Transport workers	361,000
(e) Plantation workers	1,000,000

The Indian working class is chiefly employed in light industry (cotton, jute, etc.) but also to some extent in the iron, steel, cement, and coal mining industries. The degree of concentration in industrial establishments is relatively high, owing to the recency of industrial development and the typically modern character of many of the new enterprises. The proletariat holds a position in Indian society which cannot be gauged by its actual size ; the true gauge is the vital place it occupies in the economy of the country.

The wage rates of the Indian proletariat are among the lowest, the living conditions the most miserable, the hours of work the longest, the factory conditions the worst, the death rate the highest in the civilised world. The fight to remedy these intolerable conditions and to protect themselves against the steadily worsening conditions of exploitation bring the workers directly to the revolutionary struggle against imperialism and the capitalist system, the destruction of which is necessary for their emancipation.

### Working Class Struggles

The record of proletarian struggle in India dates back to the last century ; but the movement took on an organised character



only in the post-war period. The first great wave of strikes (1918-1921) signalled the emergence of the Indian working class as a separate force, and gave to the national political movement during this period a truly revolutionary significance for the first time in its history. In 1920, on the crest of this strike wave, the Indian Trade Union Congress was formed. The second great strike wave of the late twenties, especially in Bombay, showed an immense advance in the working-class movement, marked by its growing awakening of communist ideas. The increasing millions of the workers and the growing influence of the Communists caused the trade union movement to be split in two by those leaders who sought the path of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. Thus the reactionary Trade Union Federation was formed in 1929. This policy of the reactionary labour leaders was facilitated by the disastrous "Red Trade Union" policy followed by the Communist Party in India on orders from the Comintern bureaucracy. With the arrest of the Communist leaders on a trumped-up charge (the Meerut Conspiracy case) and the further splitting of the Trade Union Congress in 1931, the wave of working-class struggle subsided once more. It was in this period (1930-1931) that the Communist Party of India, which commanded the confidence of the awakening workers, made the grievous political mistake of standing aside from the mass movement which was again assuming revolutionary proportions.

The tendency towards economic recovery commencing in 1936, combined with the mass activities in connection with the election campaign of the Congress led to a revival in the mass movement which entered once again on a period of rise. The Congress Ministries saw a resurgence of the working-class strike movement with the Bengal jute strike (1937) and the Cawnpore textile strike (1938), a resurgence which was arrested only by measures of increased repression introduced by the government since the outbreak of war; but not before the Indian working class had clearly demonstrated its attitude towards the imperialist war, particularly by the mass political anti-war strike in Bombay of 80,000 workers.

### Left Groups

The Communist Party of India, which alone in the last two decades could have afforded the Marxist leadership that above all things is needed, made instead a series of irresponsible mistakes, which find their expression in bureaucratically-conceived policies of the Comintern. In conformity with its false central programmatic aim, the "democratic dictatorship" of the proletariat and the peasantry, the C.P.I. fostered the growth of workers' and peasants' parties from 1926 to 1928, at the expense of an independent working-class party. This policy was shelved in 1929 to make way for an ultra-left sectarian policy (in the celebrated Third Period days of the Comintern), the signal expression of which came in the splitting of the trade union movement by the formation of "Red Trade Unions." This sectarian policy of the C.P.I. led to its isolation.



from the mass struggle of 1930-1931, and made the bourgeois betrayal of the struggle so much the easier. In the period of ebb which followed (1934) the C.P.I. was illegalised and has remained so since. From 1935 onwards, the C.P.I. (again at the behest of the Comintern now openly and flagrantly the tool of the Soviet bureaucracy), reversed its policy once more and held out the hand of collaboration to the bourgeoisie through the policy of the National United Front which credited the bourgeoisie with a revolutionary role. The C.P.I. was transformed into a loyal opposition within the Congress, having no policy independent of that organisation, a state of things which continues to-day.

Mechanically echoing every new slogan advanced by the Comintern to suit the changing policies of the Soviet bureaucrats, the C.P.I. has shown its reactionary character by its attitude towards the imperialist war. With its false theory of national united front, the C.P.I. is making ready to repeat its betrayal of the Chinese revolution by handing over the leadership of the revolutionary struggle to the treacherous bourgeoisie. The Communist Party of India, because of the prestige it seeks to obtain from the Russian revolution and the Soviet Union, is to-day the most *dangerous* influence within the working class of India.

Openly preaching collaboration with the bourgeoisie, and to-day with the British imperialists at war, is the party of M. N. Roy. With a narrowing base within the working class, Roy has turned for a following to the labour bureaucrats supporting the war, and to the bourgeoisie itself.

The Congress Socialist Party (1934) has from the beginning followed a policy of utter subservience to the Congress bourgeoisie, and remains to-day completely without a base within the working class. Surrendering its claim to an independent existence, the C.S.P. has been split wide open by the Communists who worked inside it, and is to-day an empty shell devoid of political substance.

To the left of the Communist Party, disgusted with its bureaucratic leaders and its reactionary policies, there exists a number of small parties and groups, occupying more or less centrist positions. Such are the Bengal Labour Party (Bolshevik Party of India), the Red Flag Communist (Communist Party) led by S. N. Tagore, etc. Without a clear-cut revolutionary policy and without making a decisive break organisationally and politically with the Comintern, these parties and groups are unable to offer the working class the independent leadership it requires. Nevertheless these groups and parties contain many tried fighters and able Marxist theoreticians, who would be invaluable in a revolutionary working-class party.

This party can be only the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India, the party of the Fourth International in India, which alone with its revolutionary strategy based on the accumulated experience of history and the theory of permanent revolution in particular, can lead the working class of India to revolutionary victory. This party has still to be built on an all-India scale, though many groups exist already whose fusion in the Formation Committee of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India has provided the nucleus for its formation.



Despite its subjective weakness in organisation and consciousness, inevitable in a backward country and in the conditions of repression which surround it, the working class is entirely capable of leading the Indian revolution. It is the only class objectively fitted for this role, not only in relation to the Indian situation but in view of the decline of capitalism on a world scale, which opens the road to the international proletarian revolution.

### **The Permanent Revolution**

India faces a historically belated bourgeois-democratic revolution, the main tasks of which are the overthrow of British imperialism, the liquidation of a semi-feudal land system, and the clearing away of feudal remnants in the form of the Indian Native States. But although bourgeois-democratic revolutions occurring in the advanced capitalist countries in previous centuries found leadership in the then rising bourgeoisie, the Indian bourgeoisie appearing on the scene only after the progressive role of the bourgeoisie in the world as a whole has been exhausted, is incapable of providing leadership to the revolution that is unfolding in India.

Connected with and dependent on British capital from the beginning, the Indian bourgeoisie to-day displays the characteristics of a predominantly compradore bourgeoisie, enjoying at the best the position of a very junior partner in the firm British Imperialism & Co. Hence, while they have been prepared to place themselves through the Indian National Congress at the head of the anti-imperialist mass movement for the purpose of utilising it as a bargaining weapon to secure concessions from the imperialists, the bourgeois leaders have restricted the scope of the movement and prevented its development into a revolutionary assault on imperialism. Incapable from the very nature of their position of embarking on a revolutionary struggle to secure their independence, and fearful of such a struggle, the bourgeois leaders have maintained their control over the mass movement only to betray it at every critical juncture.

Secondly, unlike the once revolutionary bourgeoisie of former times which arose in opposition to the feudal landowning class and in constant struggle against it, the Indian bourgeoisie has developed largely from the landowning class itself, and is in addition closely connected with the landlords through mortgages. They are therefore incapable of leading the peasants in the agrarian revolution against landlordism. On the contrary, as is clearly demonstrated by the declared policy and actions of the Congress both during the Civil Disobedience movements and in the period of the Congress Ministries, they are staunch supporters of *zamindari* interests.

Finally, unlike the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of former times, the revolution in India is unfolding at a time when large concentrations of workers already exist in the country. The industrial proletariat numbering five millions occupies a position of strategic importance in the economy of the country which cannot



be measured by its mere numerical strength. It is important to remember, moreover, that a hitherto uncalculated but indubitably very high proportion of these workers is employed in large concerns employing several hundreds of thousands of workers. The high degree of concentration of the Indian proletariat immeasurably advances its class consciousness and organisational strength. It was only in the post-war years that the Indian working class emerged as an organised force on a national scale. But the militant and widespread strike waves of 1918-1921 and of 1928-1929, which were the precursors of the mass Civil Disobedience movements of 1920-1921 and of 1930-1933 testify to the rapidity of the awakening. These workers are in daily conflict not only with the British owners of capital, but also with the native bourgeoisie. Faced by the threat of the working class, the Indian bourgeoisie has grown more conservative and suspicious. With every advance in organisation and consciousness of the workers, the bourgeoisie has drawn nearer to the imperialists and farther away from the masses. It is clear that not a single one of the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution can be solved under the leadership of the Indian bourgeoisie. Far from leading the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the Indian bourgeoisie will go over to the camp of the imperialists and landlords on the outbreak of the revolution.

The urban petty bourgeoisie, daily becoming declassed and pauperised under imperialism and declining in economic significance, cannot even conceive of playing an independent role in the coming revolution. Since, however, there is no prospect whatever of improving their conditions under imperialism, but on the contrary they are faced with actual pauperisation and ruin, they are forced onto the revolutionary road. The peasantry, the largest numerically and the most atomised, backward and oppressed class, is capable of local uprisings and partisan warfare, but requires the leadership of a more advanced and centralised class for this struggle to be elevated to an all-national level. Without such leadership the peasantry alone cannot make a revolution.

The task of such leadership falls in the nature of things on the Indian proletariat, which is the only class capable of leading the toiling masses in the onslaught against imperialism, landlordism and the native princes. The concentration and discipline induced by its very place in capitalist economy, its numerical strength, the sharpness of the class antagonism which daily brings it into conflict with the imperialists who are the main owners of capital in India, its organisation and experience of struggle, and the vital position it occupies in the economy of the country, as also its steadily worsening condition under imperialism, all combine to fit the Indian proletariat for this task.

But the leadership of the working class in the bourgeois-democratic revolution poses before the working class the prospect of seizing the power and, in addition to accomplishing the long overdue bourgeois-democratic tasks, proceeding with its own socialist tasks. And thus the bourgeois-democratic revolution develops uninterruptedly into the proletarian revolution and the establishment of



the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only state form capable of supplanting the dictatorship of the Indian bourgeoisie in India. The realisation of the combined character of the Indian revolution is essential for the planning of the revolutionary strategy of the working class. Should the working class fail in its historic task of seizing the power and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, the revolution will inevitably recede, the bourgeois tasks themselves remain unperformed, and the power will swing back in the end to the imperialists without whom the Indian bourgeoisie cannot maintain itself against the hostile masses. A backward country like India can accomplish its bourgeois-democratic revolution only through the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The correctness of this axiom of the theory of permanent revolution is demonstrated by the victorious Russian revolution of October 1917, and it is confirmed on the negative side by the tragic fate of the Chinese revolution of 1925-1927.

In India, moreover, where the imperialists are the main owners of capital, the revolutionary assault of the workers against imperialism will bring them into direct and open conflict with the property forms of the imperialists from the moment the struggle enters the openly revolutionary stage. The exigencies of the struggle itself will in the course of the openly revolutionary assault against imperialism demonstrate to the workers the necessity of destroying not only imperialism but the foundations of capitalism itself. Thus, though the Indian revolution will be bourgeois in its immediate aims, the tasks of the proletarian revolution will be posed from the outset.

But the revolution cannot be stabilised even at this stage. The ultimate fate of the revolution in India, as in Russia, will be determined in the arena of the international revolution. Nor will India by its own forces be able to accomplish the task of making the transition to socialism. Not only the backwardness of the country, but also the international division of labour and the interdependence—produced by capitalism itself—of the different parts of world economy, demand that this task of the establishment of socialism can be accomplished only on a world scale. The victorious revolution in India, however, dealing a mortal blow to the oldest and most widespread imperialism in the world will on the one hand produce the most profound crisis in the entire capitalist world and shake world capitalism to its foundations. On the other hand it will inspire and galvanise into action millions of proletarians and colonial slaves the world over and inaugurate a new era of world revolution.